

Faith and Inspiration

A Difference of One

It is a common refrain that “one person can make a difference.” Even so, we may sometimes remain somewhat skeptical of such an assertion, despite the plethora of self-affirming material that insists this is so.

Appreciative observation can readily guide us to conclude that one person can assuredly affect a single individual or an entire planet. Even a cursory review of modern history can identify individuals who to this day have imparted tremendous impressions on the hearts and minds of many people, even entire societies, for better or worse as the case may be. Names such as Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, Adolf Hitler, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Charles Manson, and Billy Graham come to mind as examples of those whose historical impact is undeniable, however heroic or horrific that impact might be.

Of course, not every person who makes a difference in someone else’s life (positive or negative) experiences fame or notoriety. Many of us may encounter or effect a “difference of one” on a regular basis to varying degrees without obvious or immediate personal or global repercussions. It can be as simple as expressing a kind word to another, or as generous as offering to pay for another’s meal, or even as valiant as saving another’s life.

Certainly, Jesus as an individual made an enormous, literally world-changing difference during his time on Earth. And while Jesus is often portrayed as addressing crowds or groups, delivering profound sermons and spiritual lessons, he is just as often depicted as basking in intimate settings or indulging in personal encounters, immersed in quiet and heartfelt conversations. Likewise, each of us as believers are called to engage the world about us at whatever scale or scope that we may find available or possible.

Of course, each of us are unique and possess the ability to contribute uniquely to the lives of others. In such manner, we may ultimately contribute to the overall expansive story of redemption that is woven throughout Scripture and that cascades from its pages onto our everyday experiences.

The Bible provides ample guidance on how to fashion ourselves as agents of constructive change. For instance, Paul exhorts us thusly: “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity” (Colossians 4:5).

The apostle James assures us that “the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). And Jude’s brief letter to believers urges us to “have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear” (Jude 22-23).

While we would not want to inflate our own sense of self-importance, people do not always account for the full ramifications of their interactions with others.

Furthermore, we do not always realize how

with their V2 rockets to carry them, Germany captured the world.

KIRK: No.

SPOCK: And all this because McCoy came back and somehow kept her from dying in a street accident as she was meant to. We must stop him, Jim.

KIRK: How did she die? What day?

SPOCK: We can estimate general happenings from these images, but I can’t trace down precise actions at exact moments, Captain. I’m sorry.

KIRK: Spock, I believe I’m in love with Edith Keeler.

SPOCK: Jim, Edith Keeler must die.

That statement from Spock is perhaps one of the most heart-wrenching lines of dialogue in the entire show. In one of the most creative twists of irony ever portrayed in scripted storytelling, it turns out that in order for the wheels of history to turn as intended, Edith Keeler’s life as an advocate for peace preceding one of the most tumultuous eras in history has to be surrendered upon the altar of fate. Truly imaginative writing, and one of the most effective portrayals of “one person makes a difference.”

In Jesus’s case, it was not just a matter of one person making a sacrifice for others. As described in Romans 5:17-19, this one man’s death represented the ultimate sacrifice — indeed, the only possible sacrifice — to achieve redemption of all creation. Jesus’s death ensures our future, a future where creation and our fellowship with God is fully restored.

We may not each be required to die, literally, as our life’s mission (though some may experience circumstances that compel them to contemplate the possibility). But we can at the very least strive to sacrifice our selfish ambitions and whims, to “die to ourselves” (Romans 6:4-8, Galatians 2:20-21, Galatians 5:24-25, 1 Corinthians 15:31), putting the welfare of others before our own desires or needs.

We may never know in this life if our words or deeds may have made any degree of difference, whether we have altered the trajectory of destiny for an individual or a nation or a world. But we should acknowledge the reality that, at even the most minimum, one person can indeed make a difference in one other person’s life, and that difference can in turn impact yet another life, until the ripple effect propagates continually.

It might be dramatic or subtle, but we are all ultimately connected as a single species striving for fulfillment and contentment. In our own families, communities, workplaces, and other spheres of influence, let us continue to seek opportunities to discover our own “difference of one.”

Local Families recall the personal impact of Hurricane Andrew



In the pre-dawn hours of Monday, August 24, 1992, Hurricane Andrew slammed into South Florida, and the lives of hundreds of thousands would be forever changed. Thirty years later, memories of that devastating day are still vivid.

“The roof of the bathroom completely collapsed just moments after the 14 of us — family, friends and a newborn baby — had hurried out of it and into a five by six-foot hallway to take shelter. We heard screams from the neighbors,” recalls Mailin Perez, whose Florida City home was pummeled by sustained winds of 165 mph.

“The strong winds flew a car into, and then out of, the bedroom next door,” Mailin said of those terrifying hours. “The adults surrounded the children to protect us, while they literally held up the walls to stop them from collapsing on us and used a twin mattress as a shield to protect us from chards of glass and debris. Our home was ripped apart, except that small portion where we were standing.”

Andrew left 250,000 people homeless, destroyed an estimated 63,000 houses and left 44 dead, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Perez’s home was declared a complete loss. “My mom, sisters, grandma and I went from having a home that was paid off, to losing everything in a matter of hours. We were literally homeless.”

While Hurricane Andrew’s winds blew away homes and property and left behind sorrow and destruction, it also prompted acts of kindness, compassion and selflessness. For the Perez family and thousands of other Jehovah’s Witnesses across South Florida, many of those acts of support came from fellow Witnesses.

The “local congregation and friends found us a place to stay,” said Mailin. “They supported us every step of the way. We were never alone.”

“Assisting others during times of disaster has a basis in Scripture,” stated Ivan Fernandez, local spokesperson for Jehovah’s Witnesses in South Florida. “Both Jesus and the Christians in the first century made arrangements to care for those in need. Today we follow that example,” he said. “When it became clear how devastating Andrew had been, many of Jehovah’s Witnesses from across the U.S. traveled to South Florida to help rebuild.”

Those who couldn’t travel to help sent in donations and clothes to support the local community. Boxes of clothing, shoes and essential items were received in the area shortly after the storm. Some of the boxes

even included certain non-essential items, like a plush, stuffed rabbit sent by a family with three small children from Waukegan, South Dakota.

Miguel Mendez, who was 13 years old at the time, recalls the devastation. “The morning after the hurricane, I got on my bicycle and went out to explore. I could barely recognize the streets, and businesses were already getting broken into.” Mendez, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, said he was the first one to arrive at the Kingdom Hall and “shortly after, started watching volunteers quickly arrive to see how they could help. From that moment on, I came every morning to help however I could.”

The Witnesses turned the Kingdom Hall into a disaster relief center. The local Kingdom Hall, which used to be located at 185 NW 1st Street in Homestead, was turned into one of the primary hubs for construction material distribution. A truck was brought in to act as a freezer, and another one was turned into a fully-staffed kitchen where meals were prepared for believers and nonbelievers alike three times a day. Washers and dryers were set up outside, as well as bathrooms and showers. Meetings for spiritual encouragement were held in the parking lot. The local Kingdom Hall became an island of hope in a sea of debris and hopelessness.

In total, an estimated 3,000 volunteers from across the country poured in to help. Many of the volunteers took time off their jobs and drove across the country from Illinois, New York, Colorado, Tennessee, South Carolina, Pennsylvania and other locations to help their fellow believers and neighbors.

Every morning, volunteers of all ages would gather by skill or task, consider a daily Scripture, and then head out to their assignments — carpeting, roofing, cleaning and drying homes. The Witnesses were among the first to engage in volunteer activities, including reconstruction and cleanup of homes.

“That experience changed me. It started to fuel my desire to do more for others in need and participate in disaster relief work,” said Mendez, who now serves as a chief electrical inspector for a South Florida city. “It led to me getting involved with other volunteer and disaster relief efforts for other Hurricanes like Wilma and Katrina. I saw people coming down from across the country, paying for their expenses out of their own pockets to give hands-on help. I’ll never forget that.”

For more information about Jehovah’s Witnesses’ relief efforts around the world, visit jw.org.

Unite on September 11 Day of Service and Remembrance

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, released a new September 11 Day of Service and Remembrance public service announcement, A Day to Remember, calling on Americans to come together in service to help our communities and honor those who stepped up to help in 2001.

On September 11th and throughout the year, volunteer projects honor those who serve our country and join with them to address the needs of their local communities and rekindle the spirit of unity and service that swept the nation after that tragic day.

Michael D. Smith, AmeriCorps CEO says, “After September 11, 2001, Americans took action to ensure the words ‘United We Stand’ had real life meaning. This year, we invite Americans to once again join in service that has the power to unite. Differences fade away, conversations spark, and relationships are



created when we roll up our sleeves to make a difference for our communities together.”

SCRIPT: A Day to Remember

There are days we’ll always remember and there are days we must never forget. After September 11, 2001, our nation came together to meet tragedy with humanity. Whether you were there, saw it on TV, or learned about it in the classroom, this is a day we must always remember. Show the unity and resolve that followed that solemn day during this 9/11 day of service. Remember the fallen by lifting our communities. Honor the heroes by becoming a hero to someone in need. Register and volunteer to support our schools, food banks senior centers, disaster readiness and other organizations. Volunteer as individuals or unite with neighbors to support our communities. This is how we make a difference and show we remember together.

Find volunteer opportunities this 9/11 day at www.americorps.gov/911-day.

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